

# Shaken Baby Syndrome: A Preventable Tragedy

# Definitions

- Clinical Definition—Shaken Baby Syndrome, or SBS, is a form of Abusive Head Trauma (AHT)<sup>1</sup> that causes brain injury, bleeding over the surface of the brain, swelling of the brain, bleeding at the back of the eyes, and other injuries not seen together in any other disease or medical condition.<sup>2</sup>
- Layperson's Definition—Child abuse involving the shaking of a baby.

# Legal Charges

- Assault on a Child—What a person is charged with for having shaken a baby or child who has been diagnosed with Shaken Baby Syndrome.
- Child Homicide—What a person can be charged with when a baby or child dies from Shaken Baby Syndrome.
- In all cases of SBS, Child Protective Services is called, and all other children in the same environment may be removed for their protection.

# What SBS is and is Not

## SBS is...

- A form of child abuse
- Often ruled homicide or murder if the child dies
- A unique, identifiable combination of injuries
- From forceful, violent shaking
- Preventable through education

# What SBS is and is Not (cont.)

## SBS is NOT...

- A form of punishment or neglect
- Found among the effects of any other form of child abuse or accidental trauma
- A pre-existing medical condition or disease
- Always seen with visible bruises
- Caused by car accidents, falls, tossing in the air, or rough play
- Caused by birth, CPR, or genetic disorders

# SBS Statistics

- It's estimated that somewhere between 1,200<sup>2</sup> and 1,600<sup>3</sup> cases of Shaken Baby Syndrome occur each year in the United States alone
- 25 percent of all shaken babies die from their injuries<sup>3</sup>
- The remaining 75 percent can suffer severe brain damage<sup>3</sup>
- Approximately 60 percent of SBS victims either die from their injuries at a later time or suffer lifetime disabilities<sup>3</sup>
- Between 55 percent<sup>4</sup> and 70 percent<sup>3</sup> of the perpetrators are male

# Other SBS Facts

- SBS is the most common cause of death in physically abused children<sup>2,5</sup>
- The younger the child, the more likely a head injury is due to abuse, such as severe shaking<sup>6</sup>
- There may be no visible sign of injury
- The injuries may not become apparent until the child enters school and shows cognitive and behavioral problems
- Fatal cases of SBS have occurred in five-year-olds<sup>7</sup> and six-year-olds<sup>2</sup>
- Even adults can suffer brain injuries as the result of a severe shaking<sup>8</sup>

# Profile of a Shaken Child

Research shows that SBS victims have some characteristics in common:<sup>2</sup>

- Most victims are less than one year old
- The majority are under 6 months old
- Twins have a higher chance of being shaken than single children



# Profile of a Shaker

- Most shakers are male, in general because
  - Men may be less familiar with babies' needs
  - Men may have financial or family stresses
  - Men may not be used to a baby's crying, and may use force to stop the crying
- Most men who shake a baby are the biological father of the child or the mother's boyfriend<sup>2,3,4</sup>
- Mothers, grandparents, stepparents, other relatives, and childcare providers can shake babies as well
- Anyone who may become frustrated is capable of shaking a baby

# Activities that DO NOT cause SBS

While potentially hazardous, these activities do NOT cause the same injuries as shaking a baby:<sup>2,9</sup>

- The baby falling off furniture or a counter
- The baby being bounced or jogged on an adult's knee
- The baby being carried in a caregiver's backpack while the caregiver jogs or runs
- The baby being tossed up and caught
- The baby jerking in a car seat when a driver stops the car suddenly

# Immediate Signs and Symptoms of Severe Shaking

A severely shaken baby can show one or more of the following signs:<sup>2</sup>

- Absence of response to stimulation
- Lethargy
- Convulsions
- Inability to make sounds
- Inability to track movement visually
- Difficulty breathing
- Blue-looking or dusky skin tone
- Unconsciousness
- Vomiting
- Crying quieted to whimpering due to brain damage
- Rolling eyes

# Long-Term Effects

The long-term effects of shaking a baby can be significant:<sup>2</sup>

- Learning and cognitive disabilities
- Behavioral disorders
- Blindness
- Cerebral palsy
- Trauma-induced seizure disorders
- Loss of motor control

# Signs of a Less-Severe Shaking

These less-dramatic signs may indicate a baby has been shaken:<sup>10</sup>

- An unusual or unexplained change in sleeping pattern
- Confusion, restlessness, or agitation
- Absence of energy or motivation
- Slurred speech
- Uncontrollable crying
- Unexplained inability to be consoled
- Unexplained inability to nurse or eat

# Why is a Baby So Easily Hurt?

A baby's body has unique characteristics that make it vulnerable to injury from shaking:<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

- Heavy head—25 percent of body weight
- Weak neck muscles—Can't resist movement
- Space inside skull—Force increases
- Delicate veins—Tear and bleed easily
- Brain is still developing—Vulnerable to injury

# What Causes Shaking?

**#1 trigger reason . . .**

**To stop the child from crying**

- Frustration builds
- Caregiver does NOT take care of himself or herself
- Caregiver loses control
- Caregiver shakes the baby

## Secondary “Triggers” for Shaking

- Frustration with toilet training
- Frustration with a baby’s choosy appetite
- Frustration with a baby’s crankiness due to being sick
- More...



# The Many Costs

- Initial hospitalization costs of \$150,000 per child<sup>3</sup>
- Ongoing treatment and in-home nursing costs of \$180,000 per year per child<sup>3</sup>
- Child's loss of childhood, teenage years, adulthood, and parenthood
- Child's life-long loss of "normal" physical and cognitive functions
- Siblings' loss of a normal relationship with their disabled brother or sister
- High public education costs

# Prevention Works!

**SBS is preventable WITH EDUCATION.**

**When parents and caregivers know . . .**

**the injuries that shaking causes**

**and**

**ways to manage their frustration and stress**

**. . . they will STOP before they SHAKE.**

# Why Do Babies Cry?

Babies cry for MANY reasons! It is the ONLY way they can communicate!

A baby may cry because he or she . . .

- is hungry
- needs to burp
- wants to suck (on a pacifier or a clean finger)
- needs a diaper change
- is too hot or too cold
- is getting sick and is cranky
- has diaper rash
- is teething
- is tired
- is over-stimulated

# More Reasons That Babies Cry

A baby may also cry because he or she . . .

- has colic
- has minor gas pains
- has a fever
- is reacting to his or her caregiver's stress
- is in pain
- is bored and needs some activity
- needs to be held and comforted
- no apparent reason at all

# Common Crying Behavior

The National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome (NCSBS) coined the acronym PURPLE™ for the Peak, Unpredictable, Resistant, Painful-looking, Lengthy, and Evening crying of a typical, healthy infant.<sup>11</sup>

“The Period of PURPLE Crying” is a trademark of the National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome.

# Common Crying Behavior (cont.)

Many healthy infants show PURPLE™ crying behavior:<sup>11</sup>

- Crying reaches its **peak** frequency and duration at about two months of age.
- Crying during this time is **unpredictable** and may start and stop without an obvious cause.
- This crying can be **resistant** to all efforts to comfort.
- The infant may appear to be in **pain**, with her knees pulled up, and a painful expression on her face.
- This crying can be very **lengthy**, and may continue for a half-hour or longer.
- Late afternoon and **evening** are often the times when an infant will cry the loudest and longest.

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# WANTED: Coping Skills

Parents and caregivers need to learn about . . .

- Stress management
- Anger management
- Discipline
- Ages and stages of children
- Nurturing
- Overall parenting

# Check the Baby's Basic Needs

- Does the baby's diaper need changing?
- Is the baby hungry?
- Is the baby being scratched or poked by something?
- Does the baby want to be cuddled?
- Does the baby want to be played with?

Or . . .

- Is the baby too hot? Too cold?
- Is the baby overtired?
- Is the baby teething?
- Is the baby bored?

If not, then . . .



# Ways to Soothe a Crying Baby

- Create a new, soft noise to distract the baby
- Show the baby something new to look at
- Sing to the baby
- Rock the baby gently
- Give the baby a warm bath
- Put the baby in a new position and gently pat or rub the baby's back
- Push the baby in a stroller
- Take the baby for a ride in the car
- Run a vacuum cleaner nearby
- If the baby seems ill, call a doctor or nurse for advice

# If Frustration Builds, Ask Yourself...

- Have I tried the things that soothe most babies?
- Is the baby safe?
- How am I feeling as a caregiver?
- Where can I best put my energy right now without hurting this child?

# Ways to Cope

A caregiver's role is not to “force” a crying baby to stop crying, but to cope with the crying until the baby is able to stop:<sup>1</sup>

- Take deep breaths and count to ten
- Say the alphabet
- Read an inspirational poem (post one nearby)
- Take a warm bath or shower
- Keep a picture of your child where crying happens most often, to remind yourself of how precious your child is to you

# More Ways to Cope

- Put baby in a crib and leave the room for 10 minutes
- Play music that soothes or distracts you
- Exercise (sit ups, push ups, jumping jacks—your baby might like to watch!)
- Call a friend, neighbor, or relative to talk, or to relieve you for a few minutes
- Remind yourself that **THE CRYING WILL END**
- If you need help, call the ChildhelpUSA Hotline at 1-800-422-4453 (1-800-4-A-CHILD), or call 911

Remember...

“...it is the baby’s job to cry. It is your job to cope with this crying.”<sup>1</sup>

You can always put the baby in a safe place and leave the room.

# Always Remember

- ~ No baby has died from crying too much. ~
- ~ If someone calls you frustrated with a crying baby, offer your help. ~
- ~ NEVER shake a baby! ~

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call the ChildhelpUSA Hotline  
at 1-800-422-4453 or 911

# Presentation Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Shaken Baby Alliance. (n.d.). What is Shaken Baby Syndrome? [Brochure]
- <sup>2</sup> National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome. (2006). SBS 101.
- <sup>3</sup> National Shaken Baby Coalition. (n.d.). Facts About SBS! Retrieved March 10, 2007, from <http://www.shakenbabycoalition.org/facts.htm>
- <sup>4</sup> Child Abuse Prevention Network. What is SBS? Commentary. Retrieved March 9, 2007, from <http://www.child-abuse.com/army/sbs/SBSwhat.html>
- <sup>5</sup> Health in Action. What is Shaken Baby Syndrome? Retrieved March 10, 2007, from <http://www.health-in-action.org/node/312>
- <sup>6</sup> The National Children's Study. Assessing the Incidence and Outcomes of Mild Traumatic Brain Injury in the National Children's Study. (Sept. 2003). <http://www.nationalchildrensstudy.gov/events/workshops/assessing-brain-injury-092003.cfm>
- <sup>7</sup> National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions (NACHRI). (2000). NACHRI Supports Findings of Conference on Shaken Baby Syndrome. Retrieved Feb. 25, 2007, from <http://www.yourchildshealth.com/halert/shake.html>
- <sup>8</sup> Carrigan, T. D., Walker, E., & Barnes, S. (2000). Domestic violence: The shaken adult syndrome. *Journal of Accident & Emergency Medicine*, 17:138-139. Retrieved March 14, 2007, from <http://emj.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/17/2/138>
- <sup>9</sup> Kiwanis Club of Ottawa, Canada. Never shake a baby! What parents and caregivers need to know. (1998). [Videotape]
- <sup>10</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2006). Shaken Baby Syndrome. (February 2004). [http://www.cdc.gov/communication/tips/shaken\\_baby.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/communication/tips/shaken_baby.htm)
- <sup>11</sup> National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome. (2003). The Period of PURPLE™ Crying. [Brochure]